

State—the Governor they just helped to elect with millions in campaign contributions—and they ask him for a costly, guaranteed lifetime retirement package, often with little or no cost-sharing by the public employee. What is a politician going to say? Sorry, but I can't help you? I doubt it.

I want to read something from the Wall Street Journal. On October 22, 2010, just prior to the last election, the Journal carried a story about the role the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees, or AFSCME, was playing in that election. According to the journal:

The American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees is now the biggest outside spender of the 2010 elections. The 1.6 million-member AFSCME is spending a total of \$87.5 million on the elections after tapping into a \$16 million emergency account to help fortify the Democrats' hold on Congress. Last week, AFSCME dug deeper, taking out a \$2 million loan to fund its push. The group is spending money on television advertisements, phone calls, campaign mailings and other political efforts. "We're the big dog," said Larry Scanlon, the head of AFSCME's political operations. "But we don't like to brag."

"We are the big dog." That about sums it up. And when the big dog barks, it expects the people it helped elect to jump. Why do you think they are spending all this money? Because public employee unions care about global warming?

Richard Trumka, the head of the AFL-CIO, a man I respect, has said he talks with the White House every day and visits a couple times a week. Why do people think he is doing that? Playing pick-up basketball with the President? He is talking about how to benefit his unions, and lately that means public employee unions.

There were some recent reports suggesting that Organizing for America—a Democratic National Committee project designed to reelect President Obama—was helping to foment the protests in Wisconsin. These unions are spending big-time money to elect politicians because they know the politicians will deliver big-time benefits. But the chickens are coming home to roost. As we are seeing in State after State, the markets have something to say about these collusive relationships and the benefits they secure. The credit-rating agencies have announced they will begin factoring unfunded pension obligations into the calculations they use to rate the creditworthiness of States. This is significant because the total value of State bond debt is estimated to be around \$1 billion, while pension debt is at least two or three times that amount.

State credit ratings reveal another aspect of the State budget crisis. The five States that prohibit collective bargaining of retirement benefits have Moody's highest credit rating. California and Illinois, which allow collective bargaining of retirement benefits for public employees, have the lowest credit rating among the 50 States. The

next four lowest States also allow collective bargaining.

Illinois is in the worst shape of all, with less than 40 percent of the funds needed to pay its public employee pensions. The Illinois situation is so dire that for the last 2 years the State has had to borrow money just to make its pension contribution. This year Illinois had to pay a 2-percent higher interest rate just to borrow money to contribute to its pension program. Now, this is madness, and it cannot go on forever.

Thirty years ago the Federal Government moved away from an expensive traditional pension plan and set up a basic pension plan in combination with a 401(k)-style defined contribution plan. The system has worked well so far, although at some point we might need to reform Federal pensions too. Some forward-looking States have begun moving to 401(k)-style plans.

In my own home State of Utah the traditional pension plan is being replaced. New employees are being given a choice between a 401(k)-style plan and a hybrid plan with a combination of traditional and 401(k)-style features.

Last year Governor Chris Christie in New Jersey added a 401(k) plan for a portion of the New Jersey workforce. In Kansas, Governor Sam Brownback and the Kansas Legislature are studying the possibility of converting their pension system into a 401(k)-style plan. In Wisconsin, Governor Scott Walker has asked that the State study the feasibility of establishing a 401(k)-style plan.

There are many potential solutions to the public pension crisis, and all of them should receive consideration. We should be encouraging these courageous Governors on rather than demonizing them and demagoguing this issue. I, for one, would like to congratulate the Governor of Wisconsin for his bold stand on the issue of public employee benefits. The victory he secured last week is significant. He stood responsibly for the long-term interests of his State rather than doing the easy thing and caving under the pressure of union-organized protests and the childish and disrespectful resistance of Democratic lawmakers who chose to flee the States rather than engage in this debate.

Governor Walker understands our greatest enemy is delay. The director of the Pew Center on the States has said that while these problems are significant, they can be solved if we act now. If we wait, the crisis will become unmanageable.

Mr. President, it is my intention as ranking member of the Finance Committee to find a way to address the public pension crises if State and local governments don't step up to the plate. I am under no illusions this will be an easy task. The problem is both large and complex. There are many potential solutions that must be studied, and some will not be pleasant.

Some of my colleagues in the Senate have a proposal to address the problem,

and I will be working with them as well. I do not have all of the answers yet, and I have not settled on what I believe are the best solutions. But we are working hard and talking to the experts about the best way to proceed.

I am sure of one thing, however, and I want to be 100 percent clear about this. There will be no Federal bailout of any State or local government. Let me just repeat that. No Federal bailout.

Just last month, after Illinois sold its high-interest bonds, the Governor indicated that he plans to ask for a Federal guarantee. Well, Governor, you can save your breath. The answer is, no.

We cannot ask taxpayers and the rest of the country to pay for underfunded pensions in Illinois, California, or any other State that made promises it clearly cannot keep. To do so would be more than unfair; it would be immoral. A Federal bailout cannot happen, and it will not happen.

Mr. President, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. KIRK. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

IRAN'S HUMAN RIGHTS ABUSERS

Mr. KIRK. Mr. President, I rise today to speak about the deteriorating human rights situation in Iran.

We understand that Esfandiar Rahim Mashaei—Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's Chief of Staff will be arriving in the United States as early as tomorrow.

Mr. Mashaei is a close friend and trusted adviser of President Ahmadinejad. Their kinship began in 1982 when President Ahmadinejad was governor of Khoy in West Azerbaijan and the Intelligence Ministry appointed Mr. Mashaei to the security team in the Kurdistan region next door. Since then, Mr. Mashaei has been a member of Ahmadinejad's inner circle.

The world knows of President Ahmadinejad's public incitement against Jews and Israel—most infamously with his pledge to wipe Israel off the map. But the world may not know the virulent anti-Israel and anti-Semitic views of his trusted adviser.

In 2008, Mr. Mashaei told Sudanese President Omar Hassan Ahmad al-Bashir:

The corrupt and criminal Zionist regime is harming not only the Arab and Islamic world, but humanity in its entirety . . . in order to save humanity from its different crises, there is no other way other than the limiting of Zionist influence on human society, because the root and origin of most of the world's current crises are related to Zionism.

Shortly after the discredited Iranian Presidential election in June 2009, Mr.

Mashaei was appointed Presidential Chief of Staff—after a very brief and unsuccessful attempt to serve as the first Vice President of Iran.

Since then, the persecution and repression in Iran has steadily increased. Thousands of peaceful protesters, dissidents and activists have been detained.

Let there be no doubt, Mr. Mashei, like his President, is directly responsible for human rights abuses in Iran. He should not be granted a visa to enter the United States and he, like his President, should be designated under U.S. law as a human rights abuser in Iran.

Mr. Mashaei's visit will come just 4 days after the United Nations Secretary-General released an interim report on the human rights in Iran.

The report states:

The human rights situation in Iran has been marked by an intensified crackdown on human rights defenders, woman's rights activists, journalists and government opponents.

Concerns about torture, arbitrary detentions and unfair trials continue to be raised by UN human rights mechanisms.

Additionally:

Discrimination persisted against minority groups, in some cases amounting to persecution.

A worrying trend is the increased number of cases in which political prisoners are accused of Mohareb—or enmity against God—offences which carry the death penalty.

At least 22 people charged with Mohareb have been executed since January 2010.

Journalists, bloggers, human rights defenders and lawyers continue to be arrested or subjected to travel bans. Blogs and Web sites are restricted and now more than 10 national dailies have been shut down for refusing to toe the official line.

Concern remains over a lack of due process rights and the failure to respect the rights of detainees.

Particularly, “concerns were expressed at routine practice for incommunicado detention, use of torture and ill-treatment in detention, use of solitary confinement and of individuals without charges.”

Finally, “concerns were expressed in public about people sentenced to death often do not have access to legal representation and their families and lawyers are not even informed of the execution.”

The report continues to detail the Iranian persecution of religious minorities, especially the Baha'i. The report notes concern for six members of the Baha'i community arrested by officials from the Intelligence Ministry in the months of June and July 2010—and the seven Baha'i community leaders recently sentenced to 10 years in prison.

Regarding Iran's persecution of its Kurdish minority, the report notes:

Members of the Kurdish community have continued to be executed on various national security-related charges including Mohareb. At least nine Kurdish political prisoners, including Jafar Kazemi, Mohammad Ali Haj

Aghaei, and Ali Saremi were executed since January 2010, and several others remain at risk of execution.

And regarding Iran's persecution of Christians, we read:

Reports also continued to be received about Christians, in particular converts, being subjected to arbitrary arrest and harassment.

The Secretary-General's report follows others by our own State Department and human rights groups like Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch.

While we expect the State Department to release its 2010 country human rights reports on March 25, these are a few highlights from the 2009 report on Iran.

Security forces were implicated in custodial deaths and the killings of election protesters and committed other acts of politically motivated violence, including torture, beatings, and rape.

* * *

The government administered severe officially sanctioned punishments, including death by stoning, amputation, and flogging.

* * *

Authorities responded to all the demonstrations with raids on opposition activists' offices.

* * *

Some prison facilities, including Evin Prison in Tehran, were notorious for cruel and prolonged torture of political opponents of the government. Authorities also maintained “unofficial” secret prisons and detention centers outside the national prison system where abuse reportedly occurred. The government reportedly used white torture—prolonged solitary confinement with extreme sensory deprivation—especially on political prisoners, often in detention centers outside the control of prison authorities, including Section 209 of Evin Prison.

* * *

The government threatened, harassed, and arrested individuals who posted comments critical of the government on the Internet; in some cases it reportedly confiscated their passports or arrested their family members.

Amnesty's 2010 report on human rights in Iran starts with the following summary:

An intensified clampdown on political protest preceded and, particularly, followed the presidential election in June, whose outcome was widely disputed, deepening the long-standing patterns of repression. The security forces, notably the paramilitary Basij, used excessive force against demonstrators; dozens of people were killed or fatally injured. The authorities suppressed freedom of expression to an unprecedented level, blocking mobile and terrestrial phone networks and Internet communications. Well over 5,000 people had been detained by the end of the year. Many were tortured, including some who were alleged to have been raped in detention, or otherwise ill-treated. Some died from their injuries. Dozens were then prosecuted in grossly unfair mass ‘show trials.’ Most were sentenced to prison terms but at least six were sentenced to death.

* * *

The election-related violations occurred against a background of severe repression, which persisted throughout 2009 and whose victims included members of ethnic and religious minorities, students, human rights defenders and advocates of political reform. Women continued to face severe discrimination under the law and in practice, and wom-

en's rights campaigners were harassed, arrested and imprisoned. Torture and other ill-treatment of detainees remained rife and at least 12 people died in custody. Detainees were systematically denied access to lawyers, medical care and their families, and many faced unfair trials.

In its 2011 World Report chapter on Iran, Human Rights Watch writes:

Iran's human rights crisis deepened as the government sought to consolidate its power following 2009's disputed presidential election. Public demonstrations waned after security forces used live ammunition to suppress protesters in late 2009, resulting in the death of at least seven protesters and, I would add, we all remember Neda, who was killed online. Authorities announced that security forces had arrested more than 6,000 individuals after June 2009. Hundreds—including lawyers, rights defenders, journalists, civil society activists, and opposition leaders—remain in detention without charge. Since the election crackdown last year, well over a thousand people have fled Iran to seek asylum in neighboring countries. Interrogators used torture to extract confessions, on which the judiciary relied on to sentence people to long prison terms and even death. Restrictions on freedom of expression and association, as well as religious and gender-based discrimination, continued unabated.

The report continued:

Authorities systematically used torture to coerce confessions. Student activist Abdullah Momeni wrote to Supreme Leader Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei in September describing the torture he suffered at the hands of jailers. At this writing no high-level official has been prosecuted for the torture, ill-treatment, and deaths of three detainees held at Kahrizak detention center after June 2009.

We cannot allow these violations to go unnoticed. Nor can we continue to turn a blind eye to the countless prisoners of conscience fighting for basic human dignity in this brutal dictatorship.

It is time we take a stand for people like Nasrin Sotoudeh, detained for her work as a human rights lawyer, women's rights activist, and defender of children who face capital charges; Hossein Ronaghi-Maleki, detained for his work as a blogger and human rights activist. He has been refused medical treatment for kidney failure; and Fariba Kamalabadi, Jamaloddin Khanjani, Afif Naemi, Saied Rezaie, Behrouz Tavakkoli, Vahid Tizfahm, Mahvash Sabet—all detained for their leadership in the Baha'i community.

As of today, the precise whereabouts of opposition leaders Mehdi Karroubi and Mir Hossein Mousavi, and their respective wives Fatemeh Karroubi and Zahra Rahnavard, remain unknown following their arrest and detention in February. Meanwhile, according to international human rights organizations, the whereabouts of hundreds of Iranians, including journalists and political activists, arrested just before the February 14 opposition protests remain unknown.

To each of them, I echo President Reagan's words: “I came here to give you strength, but it is you who have strengthened me.”

As we approach the Iranian New Year celebration of Nowruz, it is time for

the President to demonstrate this administration's commitment to the Iranian people's struggle for human rights.

We know that Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, Iranian Presidential Chief of Staff Esfandiar Rahim Mashaei and other senior Iranian government officials are directly responsible for and complicit in ordering, controlling, or otherwise directing the commission of serious human rights abuses against the people of Iran on or after June 12, 2009.

Pursuant to Executive Order 13553 and the Comprehensive Iran Sanctions, Accountability, and Divestment Act of 2010, the President should designate these individuals as human rights abusers and reaffirm our core American values: freedom, democracy and human rights.

I would just end by quoting from section 105 of the Comprehensive Iran Sanctions Accountability and Divestment Act of 2010, signed by the President into law last year. It requires that the executive branch produce a list of persons who are responsible or complicit in certain rights abuses. It says:

Not later than 90 days after the date of the enactment of this Act, the President shall submit to the appropriate congressional committees a list of persons who are officials of the Government of Iran or persons acting on behalf of that Government (including members of paramilitary organizations such as Ansar-e-Hezbollah and Basij-e Mostaz'afin), that the President determines, based on credible evidence, are responsible for or complicit in, or responsible for ordering, controlling, or otherwise directing, the commission of serious human rights abuses against citizens of Iran or their family members on or after June 12, 2009, regardless of whether such abuses occurred in Iran.

Clearly this official about to arrive in the United States meets the standard under section 105 of CISADA, and the U.S. administration should designate him as an abuser of human rights. He should not be admitted entry into the United States.

We should call it the way we see it, which is, this is one of the most dangerous human rights-abusing officials that we know of. Comprehensive data now exists from Human Rights Watch, from Amnesty International, even from the United Nations on what this man has directed. He should not be given a visa, and he should be so listed under U.S. law.

I yield the floor and suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. BLUNT. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

IRAN SANCTIONS ACT

Mr. BLUNT. Mr. President, I rise to speak on an issue I feel I have spent a

lot of time talking about in recent years but without much effect on either of the last two administrations. This is the issue of the Iran Sanctions Act. Congress has worked in a bipartisan way to strengthen and expand the Iran Sanctions Act, but in spite of our repeated efforts, the administration has not been willing to use the tools the Congress has given them.

In my mind—and I am sure in the minds of a great many of my colleagues—nothing would be more destabilizing to the Mideast region and to Middle Eastern regional security or global security than Iran's development of a nuclear weapon. I will not spend a lot of time talking about why that is because I doubt there is any Member of this body who is not aware of how dangerous this situation is or could be, which is why it is even more frustrating that we have not been able to get the administration to push a more robust set of sanctions using the sanctions policy and the sanctions tools we have given them.

During the 15 years between the time the Iran and Libya Sanctions Act was passed, in 1996, and last year, no meaningful application of these sanctions was ever adopted. From 1996 until last year, no meaningful application has ever been adopted.

In 2006, I worked closely with the Bush administration to pass a bill known as the Iran Freedom Support Act, to improve the menu in the choices of sanctions available to that administration and future administrations. Under that bill, Congress codified some of the executive actions President Clinton and President Bush appropriately took and ensured that these tools became more permanent.

Last year, alarmed again at the administration's disinterest in using the sanctions available to it, Congress again acted to tighten our sanctions policy. The Congress sunsetted the State Department's period of investigatory review to ensure that once an investigation is launched, it has to be concluded. It is now up to the Obama administration to pursue a vigorous sanctions policy that sends the message to Iran that: You are isolated in the world and the world will not tolerate this nuclear program.

On March 26, 2009, I sent a letter to Secretary Clinton asking for clarification on why the administration had not fully implemented sanctions against Iran. I had sent a similar letter to Secretary Rice in 2007, suggesting—in fact, stating—that the Bush administration was similarly delinquent in its enforcement efforts. We have given them the tools, but, simply, these administrations, in both cases, have not used those tools.

Fortunately, we now see the first indications that we are beginning to head in the right direction. Last fall, the State Department announced sanctions against Naftiran, a Swiss subsidiary of the National Iranian Oil Company. In an appearance before the Senate I was

at with Secretary Clinton a few days ago, I was positive about my sense that this was a big step in the right direction but really only one step. Since the Iran Sanctions Act, this is the first time ever the act has been used. I am pleased it has been used, but, remember, it is the first time ever it has been used.

This action—to make it even more important that it is being used and frustrating that it hasn't been used—by the State Department had an immediate effect, as I and many others have been suggesting it would since the passage of these tools to the administration. Within days of the State Department's actions against Naftiran, and according to news reports at the time, European firms such as Royal Dutch Shell, Total, Statoil, and Italy ENI announced they would pull operations out of Iran's energy sector—exactly the kind of impact the Congress had hoped this would have.

On September 29, 2010, Deputy Secretary Steinberg announced the State Department's initiation of investigations into international firms that had not yet committed to exit Iran's petroleum sector. While the full list of these firms remains classified, publicly available reports suggest that list includes at least a dozen firms, many of which are Chinese, including the Chinese National Offshore Oil Company, Chinese National Petroleum Company, and Unipet. Other firms come from Germany, from Turkey, and from Venezuela. The list also includes the Industrial Bank of China, the China Construction Bank, the Agricultural Bank of China, and the Bank of China, which are reportedly providing financial services to Iranian interests in violation of the Comprehensive Iran Sanctions Act.

Under the law that now governs our sanctions policy, the State Department has 6 months to complete these investigations before announcing whether these entities will face sanctions. These notifications are due by March 29 of this year. I am very hopeful the State Department report sends the right message on March 29. It has been a long time for those of us who have advocated that this kind of action would produce the right kind of results.

U.S. sanctions policy should complement the international sanctions effort underway at the U.N. and other international venues. There is no reason we can't pursue a strategic sanctions policy that ensures companies operating in the United States or affiliated with U.S. entities don't invest in Iran's energy sector. It is time we demonstrated that we are serious about this before it is too late.

We have now taken the first step in the right direction. It has produced exactly the results we had hoped those steps would take. I and others anxiously await the report that will come out between now and March 29 to see what the next steps are, and then we will be looking carefully to see what